

Newsletter

February 2016



pacific leprosy

www.leprosy.org.nz

Elena Naduva

Elena Naduva was born on Makogai Island – her parents were leprosy patients there. It was the normal practice for babies to be taken away from Makogai to protect them from possible infection. Elena was small and frail so she was taken to the convent in Suva to be raised by the sism Sisters. Ultimately Elena became the special charge of Sister Theodophilus. The Foundation has always been involved in Elena's care and everyone was happy to see her marry and have a family of her own. However, when Sister Theodophilus became elderly, Elena moved back to the convent to look after her and to help in the convent.

Now in her eighties, it is time for Elena to take it easy, and while Elena wants to continue to visit the convent she really wants to live with her daughter Alisi. Space is at a premium at Alisi's house, with her own married daughter and her many children living there, as well as her teenage son. Eventually a flat was built in the basement of Alisi's house for the married daughter and children, and a room chosen for Elena to live in in the main house. The

room was quite dark with a very small window and corrugated iron walls. The sism Sisters asked if the Foundation would be able to help to improve the room for Elena. As we have been involved with Elena's care since she was a baby, we were happy to help out now she is in the later years of her life.

Elena has a larger window with pretty curtains, a bed, a wardrobe and chest of drawers, an armchair and a television – so she can relax in her own room if she feels like it, or join the rest of the family at other times. She also has a special "prayer corner" which is very important to her.

Elena represents a generation of children, separated at birth from their parents because of the fear of leprosy. She never knew her parents but had the loving care of the sisters and now, also her own daughter.



Elena's prayer corner is very precious to her



Elena shows off her new wardrobe and chest of drawers



Elena has somewhere comfortable to sit if she wants to be alone.

Dr Arturo Cunanan

Continuing with our occasional articles about people who work for, and with, the Foundation, we would like to re-introduce Dr Arturo Cunanan. Dr Cunanan works with us in Samoa, the Solomon Islands and Kiribati as a leprosy consultant and often features in our newsletters.

Dr Cunanan was recently given the International Gandhi Award for Leprosy for 2015.

This Award is given "to a person or institution which has undertaken work in the field of leprosy for a period of not less than 10 years and made significant contribution in any aspect of leprosy work, resulting in the amelioration of the suffering of leprosy patients and enabling them to lead normal life." We are delighted that Dr Cunanan's work has been recognised in this way. The award is very prestigious and was presented to him by the vice president of India. In his acceptance speech Dr Cunanan said that he shared the award with the Pacific Leprosy Foundation for his work with us in strengthening the leprosy services of countries in the Pacific. In his words "it has enriched me being part of the Foundation's mission".



Dr Arturo C. Cunanan

Dr Cunanan's full-time role is as the head of Culion Sanitarium and General Hospital in the Philippines. The island of Culion was previously an isolation colony for people affected by leprosy and retains strong links with this history, as well as being a treatment centre for people newly diagnosed with leprosy. At the hospital, Dr Cunanan helps these patients and their family cope not only with the medical implications of the disease, but also the social stigma which is often associated with leprosy. Dr Cunanan is directly descended (several generations ago) from leprosy sufferers who were isolated on Culion, and he was born and raised on the island, giving him a unique understanding of and empathy with those affected by leprosy.

Dr Cunanan's assistance with our extensive leprosy control programmes in Kiribati and Samoa, and with training of medical staff in the Solomon Islands is essential to the effectiveness of our work in these countries. We are very grateful

for his enthusiasm, hard work and experience which enables the Foundation to help so many leprosy sufferers.



Dr Cunanan clearly enjoys his work for the Foundation

The next five years – a meeting in Delhi

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In November, Jill Tomlinson (General Manager) attended the Global National Leprosy Manager's meeting in Delhi which was organised by the World Health Organisation (WHO). The purpose of the meeting was to establish a new global leprosy strategy for 2016-2020, as well as providing updates on technical aspects of leprosy management and programme issues and challenges from countries where leprosy is endemic.

This new global leprosy strategy was very nearly finalised at the meeting – the finishing touches have now been completed. The goal of the strategy is to further reduce the burden of leprosy and is structured around three pillars:

- I. Strengthen government ownership, coordination and partnerships
- II. Stop leprosy and its transmission
- III. Stop discrimination and social suffering

All three of these already form the foundation of the way in which we work. We always work in partnership with the ministries of health in all countries, assisting them with training, co-ordination of screening for new cases of leprosy and checking the close contacts of all those newly diagnosed with leprosy. The involvement of the Foundation often breathes new life and enthusiasm into leprosy departments which are struggling through lack of funding, resources and support. It is usual for the leprosy

department to have been amalgamated into a larger medical department, often including TB and HIV/Aids. This means that personnel can be overwhelmed and find it difficult to fit leprosy into their busy schedules.

Stopping leprosy and the transmission of the disease is, of course, at front and centre of the Pacific Leprosy Foundation's work. This is a particularly strong focus of our programmes in Kiribati and Samoa. The introduction of MDT-Plus as a preventative treatment for contacts of leprosy patients in Samoa is hoped to reduce transmission of leprosy by 60% and in time we hope to extend this programme to Kiribati as well. In the meantime, the provision of free skin clinics in Kiribati is enabling new leprosy cases to be found more quickly, and then close contacts of these new cases are visited by health workers to ensure that they are not showing any signs of the disease. These visits will be repeated regularly for at least five years because leprosy has such a long incubation period.

Finally, the Foundation works hard to reduce the social hardship which is often experienced by leprosy sufferers and their families. This hardship can be caused in many ways – through stigmatisation by the community, through disabilities caused by nerve damage as a result of leprosy and through poverty as a result of an inability to work or discrimination in the workplace.

Your generous support is helping the Pacific Leprosy Foundation to gain real ground in these battles – thank you so much.



Medications for all sorts of skin conditions laid out ready to be dispensed at the first free skin clinic in Kiribati last October.



Training of health workers not only ensures that skills in the diagnosis and treatment of leprosy are up to date, but also gives the participants a chance to compare their experiences in the field.



Poverty and poor living conditions can exacerbate the effects of leprosy.

Samoa

Part of the work to establishing the MDT-plus project in Samoa is checking all contacts of cases going back five years. On the last visit to Samoa in November the team went to check the contacts of a young boy and girl (brother and sister) who had just been diagnosed with leprosy the week before. There are seven children in the family, all present and keen to be checked. Unfortunately both the mother and the youngest, aged three, were also found to have leprosy. Now that the MDT-plus protocols have been approved by the Samoan health authorities we will soon be able to give the other children a preventative dose of medication. This, plus careful follow up for a period of five years, has been shown to reduce the likelihood of them contracting leprosy by as much as sixty percent.

These three children have all been diagnosed with leprosy, as has their mother, Lalovaea. The other children will be regularly checked over the next five years to ensure that they have not caught the disease.



Lalovaea and five of her children



Lala's Desk

It is wonderful to be back in the office after a very exciting and busy Christmas holiday which included the marriage of my son, and a long visit from some of our UK family; I was ready to get back to "real life"! My working year is getting off to a flying start with a visit to Dunedin in the last week of February (I will just have returned when you read this), shortly followed by a visit to Kiribati.

I am so privileged to be able to see the Foundation's work at first hand, and to be able to 'do my bit' to help everything to run smoothly. On this visit, I will be concentrating on assisting the medical workers with the database of leprosy patients and their contacts. It is vital that we have accurate information about all our patients – where they live, how their treatment is progressing and, of course, when they are cured. I will also work with our Field Supervisor, Wayne,

on financial reporting – another essential part to seeing the whole picture of our work in Kiribati.

In early April, I hope to visit Ashburton, and we will be holding a donor meeting here in Christchurch later that month. I love meeting as many of you as possible to talk about the work of the Foundation and share my enthusiasm for our programmes all over the Pacific. Thank you all, too, for your interest in and support for our work; your letters, emails and other feedback makes our efforts seem even more worth while!



Notecards

Our new notecards are proving very popular! They come in packs of 5 cards of one design with envelopes, or a pack of 10 cards – 5 of each design, with envelopes. 5-card packs cost \$6.00 and 10-card packs are \$10.00 each.

A stationery order form is enclosed.



Torch Lily Design



New Hibiscus Design

Information

WHERE IN THE WORLD?

We currently manage projects to assist those affected by leprosy in the following countries:

- Fiji
- Tonga
- Samoa
- Vanuatu
- Solomon Islands
- Kiribati
- New Zealand

Thank you so much to all of you who make this work possible through your interest and generosity.

DIRECT CREDIT

We are happy to receive donations by direct credit.

If you wish to use this option, please use your surname and donor number (six figures to the right of your name and address on our appeal coupon) as a reference, so that we know where to send the receipt.

The bank account number is: **02-0800-0037987-000**



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